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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003794

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL RS GM AF EUN
SUBJECT: BERLUSCONI'S END OF SUMMER MEETINGS WITH SCHROEDER
AND PUTIN; ABU MAZEN VISIT POSTPONED

REF: A) BERLIN 3095 B) STATE 237880 C) STATE 0223920

    D) ROME 3483 E) MOSCOW 12154

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRS EMIL SKODON. REASON: 1.5 (B)(D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The agenda for PM Berlusconi's August 22/23
meeting with German Chancellor Schroeder will include the
Intergovernmental Conference and transatlantic relations. We
told the PM's acting diplomatic advisor that an excellent
vehicle for improving US-EU relations would be a commitment
from Italy and Germany to work together to increase resources
for Afghanistan. Berlusconi's meeting with Russian President
Putin in Sardinia August 29-31 is a warm up for the November
Russia/EU summit and bilateral state visit. We recommended
that Russia's role in settling the Moldova/Transnistria
conflict, and our concern over continued Russian cooperation
with Iran's nuclear program be added to the agenda. End
Summary.

Abu-Mazen Visit off

¶2. (C) On August 20 diplomatic advisor to PM Berlusconi,
Francesco Talo (senior advisor in the PM's office during the
summer break) gave Charge and Poloff an overview of the PM's
agenda and goals for his upcoming meetings with German
Chancellor Schroeder and Russian President Putin. He also
confirmed media reports that the meeting with PA PM Abu Mazen
had been postponed due to events in the region. Talo said
that while there was no firm date for the rescheduled visit,
Italy will be the first European country Abu Mazen visits
when he resumes his international travel.

Dinner, Opera and Breakfast with Schroeder

¶3. (C) Based on ref a reporting and Talo's comments, it would
seem that Berlusconi and Schroeder share a common goal for
the August 22/23 meeting in Verona, which is to repair the
damage to German-Italian relations caused by Berlusconi's
comments at the European Parliament in July and Schroeder's
subsequent cancellation of his vacation in Italy. Talo said
that events Friday evening August 22 would be strictly
private and personal - a dinner followed by the opera Carmen.
 EU Commission President Prodi will join the two leaders for
the evening.

¶4. (C) On Saturday morning August 23, Schroeder and
Berlusconi will have a working breakfast. Talo described the
meeting as an "informal, free conversation" but said that the
conversation would center on two blocks of issues: the EU and
Italian EU Presidency, particularly the Intergovernmental
Conference; and transatlantic relations. The two blocks are
linked, according to Talo, because how the EU handles
transatlantic relations is key to the success of its foreign
policy. Talo said that it was in Italy's and all EU
countries' interests to help Germany rebuild relations with
the US. "We are all in the same boat, and when one passenger
misbehaves we all suffer."

¶5. (C) One issue in which Talo saw convergence between the US
and Germany was Afghan reconstruction and stabilization,
citing Germany's commitment to the IC's efforts in
Afghanistan, and its willingness to consider Brahimi's
request to enhance and strengthen NATO's role and ISAF
presence. To Talo's request for suggestions for the
Schroeder/Berlusconi agenda, Charge emphasized that the US is
accelerating the push for financial assistance to support the
government in Kabul (ref b), particularly that related to the
UN effort to prepare for upcoming elections. A commitment
from Italy and Germany to work together bilaterally and
within the EU to increase financial aid to Afghanistan would
be an excellent practical step in strengthening transatlantic
relations (see also septel).

¶6. (C) Comment: This meeting is important to Berlusconi's
efforts to get the focus on the Italian EU Presidency off of
his Strasbourg gaffe and on to substance. He is interrupting
his summer vacation in Sardinia to travel to Verona to meet
with Schroeder, an indication of the importance he places on
Germany's role in the success of one of his top priorities

for the Presidency - the Intergovernmental Conference.

Germany has come out strongly in support of signing the
constitution basically as written by Giscard, and to resist
the call by some EU members to open items for discussion and
redraft. This is key to Berlusconi's goals of finishing the
IGC during the Italian Presidency and a subsequent "Treaty of
Rome II" signing ceremony. He will need Schroeder's help to
keep the process on track. End Comment

Putin in Sardinia

¶7. (C) Putin will be Berlusconi's guest at his summer home in
Sardinia from August 29-31. Again, Talo emphasized that the
visit was mostly personal, but it did offer the leaders the
chance to review issues in a relaxed atmosphere. Broadly,
they will follow up on items discussed at their July 29 lunch
in Moscow, and set the stage for the November 6-7 EU-Russia
Summit and bilateral state visit in Rome. Talo said that
much of the bilateral discussions would center on Russian
interest in enlarging and enhancing cultural contacts,
exchange visits and tourism. That is the public face the
Italians will give to the visit.

¶8. (C) Privately, said Talo, the leaders would discuss a wide
range of issues, from the Quartet role in the MEPP to
enhancing EU/Russian relations. The Charge noted that it
would be helpful if two issues of interest to the US and EU
could be placed on the meeting agenda. The first would be
for Berlusconi to underline with Putin the important role
Russia has to play in accelerating progress on conflict
resolution and arms withdrawal in Moldova/Transnistria (ref
c). Charge also asked Talo' if Berlusconi could reiterate
once again with Putin our strong concern over Iran's nuclear
program, and clarify conflicting reports (refs d and e) on
the level of Russian cooperation with the construction
program at the Bushehr facility. Talo promised to try to
work the issues into Berlusconi's briefing materials.
Skodon

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